

Zola should be decorated was made an affair of State, solemnly debated by the Council of Ministers at the Elysee Palace, Marshal MacMahon being in the chair, probably with his usual cigar between his lips, and his usual bottle of green Chartreuse standing handy on a cheffonnier, in order that he might help himself whenever " he felt so disposed," which, according to the scandal-mongers of the day, was pretty often. And the brave, honest, and narrow-minded Marshal, who — perhaps at his wife's instigation — absolutely refused to promote the impious Renan from the rank of chevalier to that of officer of the Legion of Honour, was in thorough agreement with all the Ministers who opposed the unlucky Bardoux when he asked that the red ribbon might be conferred on the obscene Zola. On his side, the latter, ignorant of the real circumstances of the case, and more and more annoyed by the spiteful allusions to the affair which appeared in some of the newspapers, issued an open letter formally signifying his renunciation of the red ribbon, with the result that for some years there was no further question of " decorating " the foremost novelist of France.

On January 18, 1879, the Ambigu Theatre gave the first performance of the dramatic version of " L'Assommoir "

pared by Messrs. Busnach and Gastineau, who, in point of fact, had been largely assisted by Zola, though his name did not appear on the bills, and he allowed all the merit of the play's success to be attributed to his colleagues. Goncourt tells us that during the rehearsals his melancholy mien quite chilled the actors, who by no means anticipated a success.¹ While the first performance was in progress

¹ "Journal des Goncourt, Vol. VI (January 21, 1878).